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538 call for assistance is a device to keep the audience abreast of the details by pretending that some part of the tale has been temporarily forgotten. Often the member of the audience called upon will reply, "That's the way it happened" or "You are telling it right!" Even if the speaker is not telling a story in just the way a member of the audience remembers it, seldom will anyone openly dispute the manner in which the tale is told. This is apparently an unwritten rule of courtesy of both Igbo and Gullah cultures.

In addition to pretending to forget, a speaker may turn to a particular respondent, call him by name, and ask, for example, "You know what I mean, don't you, Doc?" The Sea Island respondent may then answer, "Ki! I know what you mean, man!" This is a reassuring device for both speaker and audience because the other members as well will usually answer, "I know what you mean! I know what you mean!" Likewise, in the narration of a historical event, members of the audience who are familiar with the event may inject a word of understanding or support by adding a personal comment, such as "I remember . . . I remember the place." The audience may encourage the speaker by calling out, "Tell the story . . . tell the story!"

[171] Another practice characteristic of Gullah and Igbo, Yoruba, and Ibebio speakers in particular is that of telling a tale seemingly for one individual. A speaker may single out a person whom he knows, or one whom he may not know well, and seem to speak directly to this person, ignoring all others. He has eye contact with this one hearer alone and may even turn his back to other members of the audience sitting next to him. This turning of the back is fairly common in some West African communities and is apparently not a discourteous practice; I have never seen it offend any member of the groups observed. In fact, two informants on the Sea Islands who are close friends and avid storytellers often turn their backs to each other or sit sideways so that they are neither facing nor sitting directly next to each other. When they tell tales, each one acts as a respondent for the other, yet they turn around only when some point to be stressed requires the use of the hands as a visual aid. In most Western cultures, turning one's back to another person is an overt sign of disregard or disrespect. In Sea Island communities, however, one can observe this behavior in churches or other gathering places. Two men will often sit on each end of a church bench in such a manner that their backs are turned slightly away from each

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other. During the entire course of a sermon, they will turn around only to nod agreement to each other, to say, "Amen," or just to recognize each other's presence before resuming their former positions. This behavior is observed more often in men than in women or children, though I have seen it in young boys during the course of a storytelling event in Nigeria and on the Sea Islands.

The expectation of audience participation among Sea Island and Nigerian audiences contrasts rather sharply with the behavioral expectations of most Western audiences, who sit in silence, not necessarily because they do not enjoy the message of the speaker but because silence is a cultural sign of respect and courtesy. It is not known whether responding is characteristic of all African or related cultures, but Ruth Finnegan relates an identical practice, "replying," used by the Limba speakers of northern Sierra Leone: the audience assists the speaker by answering, "Me!" According to Finnegan, replying

> also refers to the actions of the listeners when someone is making a formal speech; they should not interrupt the flow of his presentation but should "reply" to his argument, perhaps by echoing his words or answering his rhetorical questions, perhaps by only a grunt or murmur at suitable intervals; in this way they are thought to play the important part of supporting or noting his main points as they are made. "Replying" in song is also an important practice, applied in particular to the way in which the women as a group reply in chorus to the song of a soloist, and in this way take an essential part in the whole activity.[11]

The practice of listener response in communicative events not only is common in storytelling, sermons, and speeches but is a vivid part of daily social interaction in Igbo, Ibebio, Yoruba, and Sea Island communities. The act of responding is a method of showing approval and understanding—or disapproval or misunderstanding.

For a speaker's listeners to be verbally responsive to his cues during the time he is speaking is a very good indication that they agree with or understand what he says. If they sit quietly and do not respond verbally during the course of the speaking event, then the speaker can be assured that they have either not enjoyed his presentation or not understood what has been said. Thus understanding the importance of